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SIPDIS

DEPARMENT FOR EUR/CE JAMIE LAMORE. PASS TO NSC JEFF HOVENIER

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SUBJECT: VIKTOR ORBAN AND FIDESZ - RANKLING SLOVAKIA

Classified By: Acting P/E Counselor Jon Martinson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

(U) This is a coordinated Embassy Budapest, Embassy Bratislava cable.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. FIDESZ, and especially party President Viktor Orban, have been under fire in recent weeks, both domestically and in the region over the Party's position on minorities and the representation of "ethnic Hungarian interests" in the European Parliament. In response the Slovak National Assembly, as well as the Foreign Ministers of Germany, the Czech republic and Slovakia, expressed "deep concern" over Orban's statements. FIDESZ's recently published security policy platform referencing the Ahtisaari plan as a "precedent for similar action" in relation to minority rights further complicates planning for the Hungarian/Slovak Prime Ministerial meetings planned for July.
End summary.

The FIDESZ Line

¶2. (SBU) The specific comment which led to a barrage of reaction was made by Viktor Orban at a May 23 European Parliament (EP) campaign event held jointly by FIDESZ and Slovakia's Party of Hungarian Coalition (MKP) in the Hungarian town of Esztergom. There, Orban spoke of the June European Parliamentary elections as an opportunity to ensure that the interests of all Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin are represented in Brussels. (Comment. In addition to the 22 MEPs from Hungary, Orban would include the two ethnic Hungarian Slovak MEPs elected this past weekend as those who would represent Hungarian interests. End comment.) In response, Slovak National Party president Jan Slota lashed out against Orban, and called on the Slovak Parliament to declare Orban persona non grata in the country.

¶3. (U) Additionally, FIDESZ's European foreign and security policy platform, released in late April, also raised concern with the following line: "From the perspective of the further development of the international standards of minority protection, the wide-ranging autonomies for the nationalities as outlined by the Ahtisaari plan must become a precedent for similar action."

¶4. (C) Asked by the Charge in a private meeting to clarify FIDESZ's position vis-a-vis the Ahtisaari plan, FIDESZ parliamentary Faction Head Tibor Navracsics commented that "in FIDESZ's view, the principles of the Ahtisaari plan, including the wide-ranging autonomies for nationalities, offer a solution for all similar situations of conflicts between majority and minority populations." Continuing, Navracsics stated that the FIDESZ policy statement does not advocate autonomy for Hungarians living beyond the border, the goal is to use the Ahtisaari principles to support their rights.

Reactions for Abroad

15. (U) Visiting Budapest on June 2 to commemorate Hungary's 1989 opening of its borders, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier met with PM Gordon Bajnai and counterpart Peter Balazs. Responding to questions from the press, Steinmeier remarked that he views FIDESZ President Orban's recent comments vis-a-vis the representation of Hungarian interests in the European Parliament "with concern." Steinmeier also discussed the issue in his meeting the previous day with Czech and Slovak Foreign Ministers Kohout and Lajcak. The three agreed that it would be a "serious abuse of the Ahtisaari plan to use it for the destabilization of another region." Following his meeting with Steinmeier, FM Balazs said he did not wish to comment on Orban's words, "spoken by an opposition politician at his own risk."

16. (SBU) The following day, June 3, the Slovak parliament held an extraordinary session, convened by governing coalition parties, to discuss and respond to Orban's words, According to text provided by Embassy Bratislava, the Parliament's resolution ultimately passed expresses "deep concern" at the "extreme surge of nationalism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia in Hungarian society" and the "irresponsible nationalist rhetoric of the FIDESZ party," while acknowledging the contributions of the Hungarian minority to Slovak society. Further, "the National Council of the Slovak Republic wishes to appeal to all fellow citizens of the Hungarian nationality not to succumb to the cheap demagoguery

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and nationalist calls of some constitutional officials and political representatives of the Republic of Hungary and of the SMK that might disrupt the peaceful cohabitation of Slovaks, Hungarians, and members of other ethnic minorities living in Slovakia."

Reactions from Within

17. (SBU) The Slovak Parliament's resolution, drew varied reactions in Hungary, including a FIDESZ released "position paper," distributed to Budapest's diplomatic community. The FIDESZ response calls the text of the resolution "unacceptable" and points the finger at the Slovak government, stating that "It seems clear that the governing parties of Slovakia are openly leaning towards extremist ideas. It is needless to describe the unacceptable political intentions behind Jan Slota, the minority coalition partner, but it needs to be stated that Robert Fico bears heavy responsibility for his parliamentary majority's thoughtless initiatives and unjust actions." The FIDESZ document labels the Slovak resolution "aggressive propaganda designed for domestic consumption."

18. (U) PM Gordon Bajnai - like MSzP parliamentary Faction Head Attila Mesterhazy - moved to defend Orban, calling comments depicting Orban as a neo-fascist "unworthy" and an allegation which must be rejected "by everyone." While acknowledging that Orban and FIDESZ "often" generate conflicts with neighboring countries unnecessarily, Bajnai said these do not carry the same weight as labeling someone a neo-fascist. Bajnai met his counterparts from the Visegrad countries in Krakow on June 4, and he later said the issue did not come up in his brief meeting with his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico. Bajnai and Fico are tentatively slated to meet in July, and Bajnai has indicated his intention to raise the matter then.

Comment

19. (SBU) Commentators and sources on both sides of the aisle in Hungary acknowledge that at least some of the recent tensions - and reactions - serve domestic political purposes as the EP elections campaign moved to closure. That said, Prime Minister Bajnai's and, in particular, MSzP vice-president Mesterhazy's public support of Orban is somewhat surprising based on the recent three-year history of animosity between the ruling Socialist and opposition FIDESZ parties. With the proposed Prime Ministerial meeting in July, we will see if PM Bajnai has better success in moving the bi-lateral relationship forward than his predecessor, former PM Gyurcsany.
Levine